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## **Sen. Patterson chosen to help rewrite Grandparents' visitation rights law**

**LANSING** – Sen. Bruce Patterson, R-Canton, has been asked by the senate majority leader to serve on a conference committee due to his legal expertise. Senate Bill 727, which will allow grandparents more visitation rights, is winding its way through the Legislature and is expected to end up in conference committee.

“I am flattered at being chosen to lend an expert hand in this critically important negotiation,” Patterson said. “As one of only a handful on Michigan Senators trained in law and one of the senior attorneys in the Legislature, I know and understand the delicate balance needed to shape the resolution of family law disputes.”

Patterson practiced law before being elected to the Senate. His background and experience will be helpful if the Legislature is to successfully negotiate some very troublesome waters stirred up by recent judicial decisions.

As a result of United States Supreme Court decision [Troxel] and a subsequent Michigan Supreme Court decision [DeRose] the Court of Appeals just decided the case of Johnson v. White [COA docket no. 241414] and gave retroactive effect to the conclusion that Michigan's grandparent visitation law was unconstitutional and, therefore, no grandparents in the could assert a claim to visitation if fit parents wished to deny the visitation.

“There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that grandparents play an important role in a child's life and upbringing,” Patterson said. “However, the high courts have clearly indicated that grandparents' visitation rights are not fundamental, only derivative. And they have not given much guidance to what legislation will hold up in court. They have simply said ‘deference’ must be given to fit parents.”

SB 727 restores the opportunity for grandparents in Michigan to seek visitation orders in certain circumstances so that they may participate in the lives of their grandchildren.

“I will do my best to find a solution,” Patterson said. “Hopefully we can clear up the confusion and disagreement among legislators, legal authorities and coalition groups.”

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